

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0032/01 0101240
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 101240Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2766
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6487
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4269
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2874
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7444
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1491
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4832
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1051
RHMFISI/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7175

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000032

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Specter Codel, Syria/US, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian
Territories, Iran (12/27)

¶1. Summary: Syrian press and TV on Dec. 27 expressed great joy about the press conference which Senator Arlen Specter gave at Damascus Airport, after meeting President Asad on December 27, 2006. The meeting with the President and the press conference were the lead story in all the radio and TV news bulletins yesterday and this morning. The Syrian Press focused on Specter's statement that "long experience with Syria has proven that dialogue with Syrian officials is useful." Syrian dailies and TV news highlighted Specter's statement that he has "strongly opposed the US Administration position which aimed to isolate Syria." Government-owned Tishreen quoted Specter as saying that "the Congress has the responsibility to confront the position of President Bush if he insists on rejecting dialogue with Syria." Tishreen also quoted Specter as saying that "President Bush has to change his position vis-`-vis dialogue." Papers also reported that President Asad stressed the need to solve all problems of the region, including the problem of WMD, and means of freeing the region from these weapons. At the same time, he pointed out that solutions to Middle East problems must be political, not security. Senator Specter said Asad told him that the issue of controlling the border with Iraq needs cooperation from the Iraqi side. He said he was familiar with the security agreement that Syria and Iraq signed recently and with Syria's willingness to make every possible effort to ensure stability in Iraq. On the Lebanese situation, Senator Specter noted Syria's assertion of its responsiveness to Security Council Resolution 1701 and its full cooperation with the international investigation commission into the assassination of former Lebanese PM al-Hariri. Senator Specter said that finding a political solution to problems of the region through negotiations would reflect positively on the fragile cease-fire agreement between Lebanon and Israel. Answering a question about the Palestinian situation, Senator Specter said his talks with President Asad also dealt with the efforts that Syria is making to reach a settlement between HAMAS and Fatah. Describing the current situation in Palestine as very tense, he stressed the need to use the language of dialogue and understanding to reach a solution to the tense situation in the Palestinian territories.

Papers also reported that US businessmen, teachers, and students participated in a documentary film about Syria titled "Unveiling Syria," expressed a desire to introduce a true image of Syria to the world after they discovered that the stereotypical views of Western media about Syria are misconceptions. After they lived for four

months in Syria, the participants in the film spoke with great admiration, respect and cordiality about Syrian Society and its traditions, habits and safety.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad confirms to Senator Specter that solutions to problems in the region must be of political not security nature. Identical points of view on the fact that the absence of just and comprehensive peace keeps the region in a state of constant chaos and disorder" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/27)

"Specter: Dialogue with Syria is essential.... I have strongly opposed attempts to isolate it.... Congress must confront the President's refusal to hold dialogue with it.... The US Administration blocks the peace process and demands that Israel not negotiate with Syria (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/27)

"Senator Specter: US policy towards Syria is futile. President Asad is concerned about achieving peace. Syria is cooperative with the international investigation committee but the American administration hinders the peace process. The US Congress has to confront the position of the American President if he insists on rejecting dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/27)

"US students talk about Syria: Western media circulate erroneous ideas about Syria" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/27)

"Palestinian President Abbas and Prime Minister Hanieh will meet in Amman. Israel establishes a new settlement in the West Bank" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/27)

"On the eve of President Bush's announcement of strategy on Iraq, the number of US casualties exceeds the number of 9/11 casualties" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/27)

"The Lebanese opposition continues its sit-in and peaceful moves. Lebanese MPs and figures: The February 14 team is deeply involved in the US scheme; Lebanon is part of an Arab solution" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/27)

"Egypt confirms the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. Tehran downplays the UNSC sanctions and defers its answer until after Al-Baradei's report" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/27)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Time of Treachery"

Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishrin, commented (12/27): "Once again the spiteful screamers in Lebanon level accusations against Syria after they released all their poison and intrigues and ran out of falsehoods to use against Damascus....

"After they lost their credibility with their employers overseas, these bankrupt and rancorous people are infuriated at their failure as hirelings, especially as they see that their allegations and accusations against Syria produced adverse results....

"These Lebanese are deliberately foiling the Arab League initiative to resolve the political crisis in Lebanon.... Those screamers and promoters of the Zionist-American plan prefer disorder, because, like moss, they thrive in murky, not healthy, climates....

"These Lebanese are serving Zionism and colluding against brothers and against the resistance.... Syria will remain too strong to be harmed by the enemies and hired people. It will continue to reach out to the free nationalists in Lebanon and the rest of our extensive Arab homeland, where those hired by the West have no place in the age of resistance, steadfastness, and dignity."

"An Inventory"

Ali Qasim, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/27): "Most US writers, in their assessment of President Bush's policy five years after the start of the war on terror, talk about failure, not only in Iraq but also worldwide...."

"While many people assume that this acknowledgement of failure will prompt the US Administration to revise its policies, many American writers do not agree.... On the contrary, they read in the initial signals coming from the conduct of President Bush and his team a tendency to barricade himself behind his illusion of achieving what he has so far been unable to achieve, with a change of methods or priorities if necessary."

"These American writers find in the continuation of President Bush's administration a continuation of a deadlock in international relations, a growing escalation in the existing volatile spots, and a creation of new hotbeds of tension. Consequently, the world should brace itself for another year of tragedies and crises resulting from the US policy...."

"Sanctions on Iran and Double Standards"

Dr. Adnan Ali, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, said

(12/27): "The UN sanctions on Iran once again show the policy of double standards and deliberate targeting of certain countries and peoples on the basis of their ethnicity and cultural identity, in addition to their role and policies, which might not please international policymakers..."

"The world closed its eyes and ears to the Israeli Prime Minister's recent confession that Israel possesses nuclear weapons.... The Security Council sanctions, which might be intensified and expanded in the future, will force Iran to adopt a different approach now that the methods of cooperation and transparency it has tried to adopt so far have failed....

"We will see new episodes of tension in the region, which is indeed suffering major injustices and seeing much blood as a result of the policies of superpowers...."

"A Disastrous Year"

Isam Dari, a commentator in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (12/27): "2006 was a disastrous year for the world, and our region in particular.... We witnessed tragedies in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.... Iraq saw the most appalling massacres in which thousands of innocent people were killed, whether at the hands of terrorists and extremist criminal terrorist groups or at the hands of occupiers, or the two together....

"In the Palestinian territories, the situation is not much different.... The strange thing is that those who call for democracy reject the democracy of the Palestinian people. They besiege Palestinians to punish them for their choice and they give Israel a free hand to practice its terrorism and commit its crimes against the peaceful Palestinian people....

"These same forces launched an unprecedented aggression against Lebanon.... Massacres against the Lebanese were worse than the massacres of the Nazis in World War II....

"Neoconservatives and leaders of Tel Aviv want their new Middle East to be born from the heart of destruction and to be built on the bodies of martyrs.... But although 2006 was the year of blood,

destruction, and human rights violations, it was also the year of resistance and legendary steadfastness, as embodied by our Arab people from south Lebanon to Palestine to Iraq. This will establish a better future despite all the mobilization by the enemies of the homeland, Arabism, and resistance...."

Corbin